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ABSTRACT

This document presents a two-year overview of the University of Alabama/Birmingham First-Year Teacher Pilot Program, designed to share the responsibility for aiding beginning teachers among the teacher training institution, the local educational agency, and the State Department of Education. Objectives of the program were to determine first-year teacher common and specific needs for skills and knowledge and to fulfill those needs. Needs were determined through the use of questionnaires; pretests and posttests were administered to determine the initial status and progress of each participating teacher; mid-program interviews and summative questionnaires were used to identify effective strategies for personnel support. In a first-year evaluation, the performance of the control group in respect to student attitudes, student achievement, overall teacher attitudes, and teacher competency did not vary significantly when compared to data received from a non-support group of first-year teachers. However, a more direct relationship between student attitudes and teacher competence, and student attitudes and teacher attitudes, existed for the experimental group than for the control group. Data from the second year showed significantly higher levels for teacher attitudes and principal rating of teacher competencies for the experimental group. Again, no significant differences were observed in the academic achievement level and attitudes of students of control and experimental groups. Despite some program shortcomings, the project demonstrated that the local school systems, the State Department of Education, and institutions of higher education can work together and that the cooperative effort can result in a positive difference in the behavior of the teachers. (MB)

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THE FIRST YEAR TEACHER:

Perceived Needs, Intervention Strategies and Results

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THE FIRST YEAR TEACHER:

PERCEIVED NEEDS, INTERVENTION STRATEGIES, AND RESULTS

Introduction.

The University of Alabama in Birmingham First-Year Teacher Pilot Program, which serves as the base for this paper, was designed to judge the impact of an additional year of "internship" for teachers. The project came into being as the result of an Alabama State Board of Education Resolution, January 25, 1972. This resolution suggested that the teacher training institution, local educational agency, and the State Department of Education share responsibilities for insuring the probability of success of the beginning teacher in the state of Alabama.

The University of Alabama in Birmingham was one of two universities chosen to help implement the State Board resolution, and in that role joined with seven surrounding county systems and the State Department of Education in forming a support team to work with a portion of the first-year teachers in these seven counties.*

The University personnel (six clinical professors), and the three State Department of Education consultants worked with a coordinator in each county to assist a random sample of first-year teachers in areas of skills and competencies jointly determined by veteran teachers, administrators and

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* The funding agency was the State Department of Education, Montgomery, Alabama

first-year teachers themselves. The experimental group of first-year teachers numbered one hundred (100); the control group, with which the experimental teachers and their students were compared, also numbered one hundred (100).

Program Objectives.

The general research objectives of the UAB based program were to provide insights and conclusions concerning the following specific goals:

1. to determine the most common and specific needs of first year teachers with respect to skills and knowledge,
2. to develop instruments to enable beginning teachers and their support teams to systematically assess progress toward the identified goals,
3. to identify the most effective support techniques developed during the pilot program,
4. to identify potential problem areas so that they might be avoided
5. to assess the value of the First-Year Teacher Pilot Program with respect to teacher competency, reflected in (1) teacher attitudes and behavior and (2) student attitudes and achievement.

The following specific questions were addressed in an effort to evaluate the First-Year Teacher Pilot Program in terms of the objectives:

1. Were student attitudes significantly different between control and experimental teachers?
2. Were teacher attitudes significantly different between control and experimental teachers.
3. Was student achievement significantly different between control and experimental teachers?
4. Were teacher competencies significantly different between control and experimental teachers?
5. Was the correlation of student attitude to teacher attitude and/or competency significantly different between control and experimental teachers?
6. Was the correlation of student achievement in the elementary grades to teacher attitude and/or competency significantly different between control and experimental teachers?

Instrumentation.

Methods for gathering the data needed to ascertain the degree to which the stated objectives of the program were achieved included the folowing:

1. Standardized Tests (students of Experimental & Control teachers)
   A. Grades 3, 4, 5 (California Achievement Test; pre and posttest)
   B. Grades 8-12 (School Morale Scale; attitude, posttest)

2. Non-Standardized Tests (Experimental & Control teachers and students)
   A. Grades 3, 4, 5 (Cowles Attitude Test; pre and posttest)
   B. Semantic Differential Attitude Instrument (all first-year teachers; pre and posttest)
   C. Educational Testing Service/UAB Competency instrument (all first-year teachers; posttest only)

3. Assistance Reports (based on conferences, visits, or observation of experimental first-year teachers) by:
   A. Clinical Professors
   B. Cooperating Teachers
   C. Principals
   D. SDE Coordinator and Consultants

4. Interviews (Experimental only, both formative and summative)
   A. First-year teachers (experimental)
   B. Principals
   C. Cooperating Teachers
   D. Coordinators (LEA, SDE, UAB)
   E. Clinical professors

5. Questionnaire (Experimental and Control first-year teachers)

Implementation

Given the needs of first year teachers as identified by the questionnaires returned by veteran educators in the state and the first year teachers themselves, the UAB consortium agreed on tasks to be performed by each agency; the UAB professors, The State Department Consultants (SDE) and the Local Educational Agency (LEA). The tasks assigned to each agency tended to be those jobs which available personnel was best suited to perform. For instance, the LEA dealt primarily

with matters which individual school districts controlled, ie: record keeping procedures, classroom discipline and management, etc.

Because of the administrative acumen of SDE personnel, this agency was in charge of planning all team meetings (the gathering of first year teachers, cooperating teachers, UAB professors, SDE consultants and principals). In these meetings the first year teachers and the support team offered encouragement and suggestions in perceived problem areas. The problem areas were identified either by the first year teachers themselves or the UAB professors and SDE and LEA personnel who observed actual classes. Most of the problem areas which were addressed fell into the broad categories of 1) planning, 2) teaching skills, 3) record keeping, 4) evaluation, and 5) discipline.

The UAB professors addressed the needs of the first year teacher 1) in the team meetings, 2) in individual conferences [usually immediately after actual classroom observation], and 3) in half the cases, at the UAB teacher center where each of fifty first year teachers and their cooperating teachers came for three days during the school year.

State Department Consultants also worked with first year teachers on planning, but in addition much of the SDE Consultant's time was spent on interactive skills. Each of the first year teacher's teaching procedure was analyzed using the Verbal Interaction Analysis and Observation System

and the explanation of the instrument engendered considerable interest among the teachers. Furthermore the SDE personnel also assisted and educated the first year teachers in such areas as Ethics (NEA Code), responsibilities (Alabama Law) and clerical/managerial tasks.

The Local Educational Agency was responsible for in-field trouble-shooting and support. Cooperating teachers offered early support during the first few days of the school year and county coordinators made available assistnace (in terms of equipment, materials, etc.) which preliminary meetings with all three agencies had indicated as being available.

All in all the three agencies responsible for implementing the program worked remarkably well together according to extensive, personal interviews carried on four times during the two year period. The working relationship between the SDE and the local districts involved in this project remains a very viable one. Many of the procedures introduced by the program have been carried on even though the University personnel is no longer available.

Results

In general, the objectives of this particular intervention program as stated earlier were met, or at least approached. For example, the most common needs of the teacher as perceived by them and veteran colleagues were ascertained (#1). Instruments were designed to systematically ascertain the initial status of the teacher and to plot his progress (#2). The interviews (two per year) and the summative questionnaire identified the most effective strategies for

support personnel (#3). The observations, team meetings, and conferences (UAB, SDE) accurately established areas of the teacher's "competency" which might need attention (#4). The research component of the program attempted to ascertain the value of the program in terms of 1) teacher attitude and behavior and 2) student attitude and achievement. The results are shown in the following pages.

Data analysis and interpretation (the first year). Student attitudes were measured by the Cowles Pupil Opinion Instrument for both elementary and special education students. Attitudes for secondary students were measured by the School Morale Scale. Grade level and initial differences in attitudes (measured by pretest) were treated as control variables when available. The influence attributable to these variables was taken out by the use of analysis of variance and/or analysis of covariance. It was found that, in all comparisons, student attitude did not differ significantly between control and experimental group teachers.

Teacher attitudes, both elementary and secondary, were measured by the Semantic Differential Instrument. Pretest scores were available, and hence analysis of covariance was used. Overall, no significant difference was found between control and experimental teachers; however, two terms on the Semantic Differential did elicit significantly different responses between experimental and control teachers. Control teachers were more committed to "authoritarianism", and to the notion that "education is strict coverage of subject matter."

Student achievement was measured by the California Achievement Test (elementary students), and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (special education students). No achievement measure was used for secondary students. Both pretest and porttest scores were available for elementary and special education students, and thus it was possible to treat grade level and initial differences in achievement as control variables. It was found that, using these control variables, student achievement was not significantly different between students of control and experimental teachers.

Teacher competency was measured in several ways. The Educational Testing Service contributed items to an instrument for measuring competencies outlined by UAB staff. On the basis of the ETS/UAB Instrument alone, no significant difference in competency was found between control and experimental teachers. In addition to the ETS/UAB instrument, the First-Year Teacher Pilot Program personnel developed three competency measuring instruments (Forms L, M, and N) to measure proficiency in professional behavior, managerial tasks, and planning-instructional strategies, respectively. Based on the data from two readings, it was found that principals rated significantly higher those experimental teachers who had cooperating teachers assigned to them on a one-to-one basis.

Using the Fisher z - transformation, significance tests were done between control and experimental groups on correlations between (a) student and teacher attitudes, (b) student achievement and teacher attitude, (c) student attitude and

teacher competency, and (d) student achievement and teacher competency. A significant difference ($p < .05$) was evident in two of the tests made. These were: (1) student attitude (Pupil Opinion) and teacher competency (ETS/UAB) and (2) student attitude (SM Scale) and teacher attitude (Semantic Differential).

By way of interpretation, it can be said that a more direct relationship existed between student attitude (Pupil Opinion) and teacher competency (ETS/UAB) in the experimental group than in the control group. Indeed, since the correlation in the control group was negative (-0.275), it may be inferred that teacher competency as measured for the control group adversely influenced student attitude.

Similarly, it can be said that a more direct relationship existed between student attitude (SM Scale) and teacher attitude (Semantic Differential) in the experimental group than in the control group. Again, the correlation for the control group was significantly negative (-0.4356). It is certainly strange that, in the control group, student attitude was negatively influenced by teacher attitude. It appears that, without the assistance of the support team, those teacher attitudes that are deemed desirable may be inappropriate.

Although it did not occur to a statistically significant extent, it was found, through a questionnaire administered late in the year, that teachers in the experimental group 1) recognized more of their needs, 2) asked for more assistance, and 3) consequently received more help in areas of instructional

techniques, classroom management, and discipline in the classroom. A final note: Of the one hundred teachers in the experimental group, all but four taught the following year; twenty of the control teachers did not teach the second year.

The Second Year. At the conclusion of the second year of the program, it was found that teacher attitudes toward the concepts "Evaluation of Student Achievement", "Interaction Analysis", and "Experienced Teacher" were significantly higher for experimental group teachers than for control group teachers. Data from the second year also revealed that principals rated secondary level experimental group teachers significantly higher in instructional competencies than control group teachers. In addition, it was found that principals rated both elementary and secondary experimental teachers who attended the teacher center significantly higher in managerial and professional competencies than those teachers not attending the teacher center.

The two-year study examined the academic achievement and attitudes of students of randomly chosen first-year teachers who recieved special assistance (the experimental group) and students of randomly chosen teachers who did not receive special assistance (the control group). It was found both years that there were no significant differences in student achievement or attitude toward school between the two groups.

Summary

A number of factors unquestionably had a significant impact on the value and the importance of the program.

In retrospect, some could have been avoided, some may be structually inherent in the "schooling" organizational system. In any case the project demonstrated that the local school systems, The State Department of Education and Institutions of Higher Education can work together and the cooperative effort can result in a positive difference in the behavior of the teachers.